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FREE VERSE AND THE IMAGISTS IN THE AMERICAN POETIC REVIVAL

Amy Lowell's Critical Estimate of Robinson, Frost, Hilda Doolittle and Others—Pound's Note of Protest and an Anthology

SEVERAL volumes of verse lay on the table. Beside them was Amy Lowell's "Tendencies in Modern American Poetry."

Priscilla Ames, who had come in with Doctor McFabre and Dick Owen, was turning the leaves of volume after volume.

"Oh, you've got Amy Lowell's book!" she exclaimed as soon as her eye caught the title.

"I like her poetry," she explained. "Of course you do," said I. "She is a New Englander and so are you."

"That is not a kind thing to say," remarked The Lady, who had entered the room in time to catch the last sentence.

"Not if you look at it in the right way," I explained. "Clannishness, properly understood, is one of the finest human traits."

"Hear! Hear!" exclaimed Owen. "I am glad you agree with me," said I. "You will also agree with me when I say that concentration is the essence of all virtues as well as the virtue of all essences."

"Clannishness is only a form of concentration. But we are getting a long way from Amy Lowell. I am not at all surprised that Priscilla admires her."

"What is an Imagist?" Doctor McFabre asked, as he picked up Wordsworth and began to read the great "Ode on Intimations of Immortality."

"I do not think the world is much more interested in the definition that you seem to be," I replied. "It is a matter that occupies the attention of those who still care more for the technique than the substance of poetry."

"I understand that the ordinary rhymed metrical verse bears about the same relation to great poetry that the music of a hymn tune bears to the Tannhauser overture."

"I am perfectly comprehensible theory. Some poetic things have been produced according to its formula. Miss Lowell says that Hilda Doolittle, daughter of Professor Doolittle, director of the Flower Observatory of the University of Pennsylvania, is one of the greatest of the Imagists."

"O be swift—we have always known you wanted us. We fled inland with our flocks, we pastured them in hollows, cut off from the wind and the salt track of the marsh."

"We were enchanted with the fields, the tuft of coarse grass in the shorter grass—we loved all this. But now, our boat climbs—hesitates—drops—climbs—hesitates—crawls back—"

"I can see the shore of the sea, its marshy tracts and the sheltered places, and I can see the boat struggling with the waves. It is all so true!" exclaimed Priscilla.

"Whether you call it poetry or not, there is something fine in it," I admitted. "Her poem on 'Circe,' in which the woman who could entice all men to her laments the absence of the one man of her heart, is a wonderful achievement."

"But why would not that sound just as well printed as prose?" asked Owen. "It would," said I. "It would be rhythmical prose of great beauty. But I will not quarrel with any one who wishes to chop it up into short lines beginning without capital letters and call it poetry."

"I think I shall stick to old-fashioned verse as a steady diet," said Dr. McFabre. "If you take Miss Lowell as a guide,"

discussion of Miss Doolittle is one of my reasons for thinking that she is a better critic than poet. Miss Lowell finds that John Gould Fletcher has written some fine things, and she says his tribute to Lincoln is the finest that has been written. It begins:

Like a gaunt, scraggly pine Which lifts its head above the mournful sandhills: And patiently, through the dull bitter years Uncared and uncared for, starts to grow. "You see the influence of Whitman here."



HILDA DOOLITTLE

Indeed, Whitman is the inspiration of many of the new poets. Some of them, as Ezra Pound has done, frankly admit their indebtedness. Others imitate and say nothing. Miss Lowell has many fine things to say about Edward Arlington Robinson, but she might have traced his poetical origin a little more clearly.

There is a Wordsworthian quality about him which becomes strikingly manifest if one reads the two men alternately, a quality of simplicity and directness that moves straight ahead with the story, without recourse to the tricks or the artifices of lesser poets. Miss Lowell finds Robinson a link between the poetry of the past and that of the present.

Robert Frost, Edgar Lee Masters and Carl Sandberg connect Robinson with the Imagists. I confess that I cannot understand how she can like Sandberg, yet she quotes one of the prosiest bits of stuff I ever saw put forth as verse and confesses that it is little short of sublime. This, I suppose, is because she is intellectually predisposed to enjoy the freak verse. Yet, after all, her book is likely to have a long life as an intelligent and acute study of an important intellectual movement in America. It is admirably done. It is difficult to see how it could have been done better or more sympathetically.

"I see that some one in London calls Ezra Pound one of the greatest poets of the day," said Priscilla, who had been looking over "Lustra," containing his latest work.

"Mr. Pound undoubtedly has poetic gifts," said I, "but as I read him I find him in revolt against accepted standards, not only of verse form, but of life itself. Now, you know, poetry of revolt is always of transient interest. The only poetry that lives is that which contains a sane application of great ideas to an intelligent conception of life. It has a moral content, not in the sense that it is didactic, but in the sense that it is based on the fundamental moralities on which the world has agreed as necessary to an orderly and progressive society. Mr. Pound challenges these and announces that he is going his own gait regardless of what the world thinks. The road to great poetry does not lead in that direction. Neither does it lie in the direction toward which is headed that group of writers of new verse from which Alfred Kreymborg has drawn for his second anthology. Here is a sample. It is a poem called 'Axiom' and is written by Walter Conrad Arensberg. Listen to it:

From a determinable horizon absent spectacularly from a midnight which has yet to make public a midnight in the first place incompactly copied the other in observance of the necessary end guarantees the simultaneous insularity of a structure self-contained a little longer than the general direction of goods opposed tangentially.

"What does it mean?" asked Owen. "I can get no meaning out of it, but I suppose it may be intended to produce the same effect on you and me that we received when we first tried to understand the axioms of our geometry. It is an abuse of language to call that sort of stuff poetry. Language is misused in the same way when Mr. Kreymborg calls one of his own productions poetry. He writes:

We have a one-room home. You have a two-room, a three-room, four-room. We have a one-room home because a one-room home is all we have. We have a one-room home because a one-room home holds all we have. We have a one-room home because we do not want a two-room, three-room, four-room.

"And so on for four pages. This is sheer idiocy. Mr. Kreymborg is the man who welcomed Alfred Watts as a new free-verse poet of great promise. Alfred Watts is now known to be the joint creation of Joyce Kilmer and Margaret Wildemer, who agreed to write in free verse the most meaningless things they could think of and send them to the magazines that printed that sort of thing. They were both surprised and gratified at the success of their plan, for it vindicated their own judgment of the quality of much of what faddists now accept as poetry."

"I think I shall stick to old-fashioned verse as a steady diet," said Dr. McFabre. "If you take Miss Lowell as a guide,"

said I, "you may find in the new kind of poetry something worthy of attention."

"But I find some beautiful things in this Anthology," said The Lady. "Is my taste depraved?"

"Oh no. There are many beautiful poems in it, but they are fine in spite of their form and not because of it."

GEORGE W. DOUGLAS. TENDENCIES IN MODERN AMERICAN POETRY. By Amy Lowell. New York: The Macmillan Company, \$2.50.

THE GREAT WAR IS LIKE THE CRUSADES

Men Are Fighting for an Ideal of Democratic Government on Earth

Out of the ruck of innumerable and more or less valueless "war books" David Jayne Hill's "The Rebuilding of Europe" emerges outstandingly. The eminent jurist writes out of the background of intimate experience with European politics and diplomacy and from the philosophic depths of a trained historian and a university professor.

Dr. Hill served, after leaving his academic chair, as United States Minister to republican Switzerland and democratic Netherlands, and as ambassador to autocratic and imperialistic Germany.

The text considers the great war only in relation to its consequences. It surveys old Europe and forecasts the promise and achievements of the new Europe. The preliminaries on which he bases his conclusions are as valuable as his ultimate prophecies. Through a carefully studied and accurately informed discussion of the development of diverging governmental ideals and national and racial "zealots" he informs the reader of the primary causes of the world conflagration. Many perplexities of diverse and conflicting policies are clarified. The evolutionary transfer of sovereignty from the State to people is pointed out in its relation to the war.

The author's views are based on the conditions which he sees in the world. The citizen comes in Doctor Hill's statement that not since the Crusades battled for the Christian faith has there been waged a war so abstract in its aspirations and aims. Two opposed principles of government philosophy are keenly defined in their life-and-death struggle—imperialism at its last desperate stand and democracy, wide-spreading and impelled by the will for victory.

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Dr Howe's Remedies

Dr. Frederick C. Howe, Commissioner of Immigration at the Port of New York, has written one of the most inflammatory books since the outbreak of the European war. It bears the ubiquitous title "The High Cost of Living," which in itself predisposes the "common people" favorably toward a Russian massacre of all profiteers, and conversely all food profiteers to a more systematic scourge of the average citizen.

Mr. Howe explains, with the aid of congressional, State and international reports, the workings of the various boards of trade, chambers of commerce, railroads and cotton exchanges and shows first how the producer is forced either to sell under the buyers' conditions or not at all, and then how the ultimate consumer is mulcted by the same forces. Exchanges, railroads and banks are all eminently guilty in this "blockade" of the American people.

The author sees a remedy in the experiences of Australia, Denmark, New Zealand and Germany, where co-operative dairies and municipally-owned abattoirs and transportation facilities enable the producer and consumer to get together. He also suggests the extension of the parcel post so as to permit the mailing of everything from a single egg to a cow or a ton of coal.

Mr. Howe has great faith in the single-tax philosophy as the best means to prevent a tenant-farmer problem in this country such as has harassed England for so many generations.

THE HIGH COST OF LIVING. By Frederick C. Howe. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, \$1.50.

Teamwork by Fourteen Novelists

Fourteen American authors had a great deal of fun in writing a composite novel about suffrage and politics. The result of their united efforts is a thrilling, absorbing work that has a dash of love throughout, vitality in each line and a decided punch in every one of the fourteen chapters.

"The Sturdy Oak" is a euphemistic title intended to describe the strong, chivalrous oak of manhood protecting the modest, shrinking violet of womanhood from the blitheness of a storm-blast political world. Briefly, the book deals with the troubles that beset one George Remington, "sturdy oak" candidate for district attorney in a war-brood town. Being inexperienced, he makes the fatal mistake of taking sides on the suffrage question, vigorously denouncing the votes-for-women crusade at the outset of his campaign.

But Remington has considerably changed his views before this delightful denouement. He is surprised with what wisdom the story flows along. Few readers, indeed, would know that the book was not written by a single author but it is not for the frank announcement at the outset. These are the authors of the different chapters: Samuel Merwin, Harry Lee Wilson, Fannie Hurst, Dorothy Canfield, Kathleen Norris, Henry Kitchell Webster, Anne O'Hagan, Mary Heaton, Alfred Miller, Ethel Watt, Mumford, Marjorie Benton Cooke, William Allen White, Mary Austin and Leroy Scott. Mary Austin furnished the theme and Elizabeth Jordan edited the 1918.

THE STURDY OAK: A Composite Novel of American Politics by Fourteen Novelists. New York: Henry Holt & Co., \$1.46.

Fabre for Children

Jean Henri Fabre's scientific stories for children are so popular in France that the book containing them has run through thirteen editions. He is known on this side of the ocean chiefly as a student of insect life. His scientific knowledge is broader than that in the book for young people he describes the natural wonders under the earth, as well as the plant and animal life on its surface.

Trudy and Timothy in Book

A little girl to whom "Trudy and Timothy" was read during its serial run in a child's magazine was delighted when her father took the story home to her in book form. Her eyes sparkled and she asked eagerly, "May I have it?" It is the story of a little girl who went from the city to live on a New Hampshire farm while her father and mother were seeking health in the South.

There is a little boy and a tame hen, a Santa Claus man, the first sight of an airship which the little girl helps to win a race, a real story which the girl and the boy manage and any number of exciting and interesting adventures, and the surprising return of her parents when the little girl least expects them. It is an altogether pleasing story that will be read with interest by children ten years old.

TRUDY AND TIMOTHY. By Bertha Currier Porter. Illustrated by May Aiken. Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company, \$1.

The SECRET WITNESS. Startling Revelations of Truistic treachery in the thrilling new war novel. By George Gibbs. How a man and a girl outwit two powerful secret service systems. illus. \$1.50 net. BIG EDITIONS. This is a hot one!

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Or, The Perils of a Young Civil Engineer. By EDWARD STRATEMEYER. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.25 net. One surprise is followed by another, and the young engineer is confronted by many perils. A story that will make Dave Porter more of a hero than ever.

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Or, The Honor Graduate. By NORMAN BRAINERD. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.25 net. An athlete, who is far more than merely an athlete, is forced to go through one trying situation after another in quest of the coveted award. A very keen understanding is shown of the type of active boy that makes "an officer and gentleman."

CAMP FIRE GIRLS AND MT. GREYLOCK

By ISABEL HORNIBROOK. Illustrated. 12mo. \$1.35 net. The adventures of a group of Camp Fire Girls whose invigorating outdoor life around the famous mountain qualifies them for joining the new patriotic organization formed amid Camp Fire ranks, the Minute Girls of 1916, which aims at training girls to be of service to their country in any emergency of peace or war.

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With Music, Finger Plays and Rhythms. By MARY LEORA HALL and SARAH ELIZABETH PALMER. With frontispiece and pen-and-inks. \$1.25 net. The story plays and finger plays are bright and attractive, and the rhythms have a rare charm that comes from combining good music with the melodiousness that children love. All songs, plays and tone-calls in the book have proved their worth and popularity by trial.

Worthwhile Books for Discriminating Readers

The Definite Object

By JEFFERY FARNOL. The New York Tribune says: "It is a charming and a lovable personality that is revealed, intimately with very great detail."

Scandal

By COSMO HAMILTON. The author of "The Blindness of Virtue" writes a thoroughly original story of how Beauty "underdresses, self-willed, ran her head into the nose of a most distinguished and, in getting entangled, was taught a lesson."

The Indian Drum

The remarkable mystery story of the Great Lakes by William MacHarg and Edwin Baer. Of which Col. Roosevelt says: "The book has appeared to me particularly as one of those exceedingly strong bits of work peculiarly American in type, which we ought to greet as a lasting contribution to the best American work."

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